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Angola: The Growing UNITA Insurgency

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An Intelligence Assessment

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ALA 83-10098C

July 1983

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Angola: The Growing UNITA Insurgency

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An Intelligence Assessment

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African and Latin American Analysis, with research
assistance from [] Office of
Central Reference. It was coordinated with the
Directorate of Operations and the National
Intelligence Council. []

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Angola: The Growing UNITA Insurgency

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Key Judgments

*Information available
as of 1 June 1983
was used in this report.*

Since last October, Jonas Savimbi's South African-backed National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) has enjoyed greater military success than at any time in the past.

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The insurgents have virtually doubled the territory they control in Angola's southeastern quadrant. UNITA's forces in this sparsely inhabited region have been increasingly using conventional military methods rather than purely guerrilla tactics.

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In more populous central Angola, UNITA has intensified its guerrilla operations, isolated a number of government-held positions, and seized Western and Communist foreign aid personnel as hostages. The guerrillas have also stepped up their forays into the northern third of the country, where they have successfully attacked key transportation links and other targets.

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There are several reasons for UNITA's growing success:

- The insurgent group has been expanding in recent years.
- It has benefited from strong leadership, high morale, and good discipline and organization.
- South Africa's already substantial aid has probably increased.

Other key factors underlying UNITA's success are the growing military, economic, and political weaknesses that plague the Soviet- and Cuban-backed Marxist regime in Luanda.

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We believe UNITA may be able to take some additional territory during the next several months. Its next major gains could come in the northeast, where the Angolans and Cubans do not have a strong military presence.

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The insurgents, in our judgment, will find it more difficult to make major new advances in the other regions in the immediate future because of the presence of sizable Angolan and Cuban troop concentrations. In the southeast, we expect UNITA forces during the next few months to concentrate on consolidating their recent gains and on preparing to defend against a possible government-Cuban counteroffensive. UNITA also is likely to continue guerrilla operations in central Angola. [REDACTED]

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We believe that UNITA's successes since late last year have made it even more difficult than before for the Luanda regime to contemplate sending the Cubans home—a precondition for a settlement of the Namibian problem—in the absence of some sort of UNITA-MPLA accommodation. Soviet-backed hardliners in the MPLA appear to be preventing any serious negotiations with UNITA. [REDACTED]

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Yet, there remains a possibility—considering the acute economic and military pressures besetting the dos Santos regime—of a breakthrough in the Namibia negotiations that includes an Angolan commitment to a phased withdrawal of Cuban military personnel. If a Cuban withdrawal were to occur without an end to the UNITA-MPLA war, we believe the insurgents would make significant military gains. Just how far UNITA would advance in such circumstances would depend on whether some Cubans remained, on whether they played active combat roles, and on South African actions. [REDACTED]

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A *total* Cuban withdrawal, in our view, probably would paralyze the Angolan Army and enable UNITA to win the war outright in the absence of a UNITA-MPLA accommodation. [REDACTED]

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We believe that even if Namibia became independent, depriving South Africa of the ability to use Namibian territory, Pretoria would probably find a way to continue assisting Savimbi. And even if South Africa were to stop providing aid, we believe the well-organized, highly motivated insurgents would pose a formidable threat to any MPLA regime that no longer enjoyed Cuban protection. [REDACTED]

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Contents

	<i>Page</i>
Key Judgments	iii
Introduction	1
Recent Insurgent Gains: Operations on Three Fronts	1
Expansion in the Southeast	1
Intensified Campaign in Central Angola	2
Breaking New Ground in the North	3
Reasons for Insurgents' Success	3
UNITA's Growing Strength and Potency	3
More South African Aid	3
Government's Weaknesses and Disadvantages	7
Anxiety in Luanda	9
UNITA's Prospects	9
Reconciliation With the MPLA?	10
A Cuban Withdrawal?	10

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Angola: The Growing UNITA Insurgency

Introduction

Since last October, Jonas Savimbi's National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) has enjoyed greater military success than ever before. The insurgents now control the southeastern quadrant of Angola, have isolated several key government positions in the central part of the country, and have stepped up raids and sabotage in the government-dominated north.

We believe UNITA's gains have made Luanda even more uneasy about agreeing to a withdrawal of all Cuban combat forces from Angola—a precondition insisted upon by South Africa before it will remove its own forces from neighboring Namibia and grant independence to that territory.

This paper discusses UNITA's recent successes, their impact on the Luanda government, and the insurgents' prospects for further gains.

Recent Insurgent Gains: Operations on Three Fronts

UNITA has been expanding its area of control in the sparsely populated southeast since the late 1970s. In central Angola—where most of UNITA's ethnic support is concentrated—it has been conducting guerrilla operations for an even longer period. UNITA has also been sending patrols and raiding parties into parts of northern Angola for several years. Starting late last year, UNITA operations on all these fronts became bolder and more intensive.

Expansion in the Southeast

UNITA forces began moving out from their bases in Cuando Cubango Province last October. They captured an Angolan garrison at Lumbala in November.

In the next few months they advanced steadily northward and overran several small towns and garrisons between Lumbala and the Benguela Railroad. Several government garrisons that were too strong to be assaulted were surrounded and isolated.

Western journalists witnessed two of the battles during this campaign—at Cangonga and Munhango. They reported that regular UNITA battalions mounted well-planned operations against the garrisons at both towns. Some government troops were killed—at least 200 defenders were reported killed at Cangonga, for example—while others fled. UNITA's forces looted and destroyed the captured garrisons and then withdrew to avoid possible government counter-attacks.

By April, the insurgents had gained control of most of Moxico Province, thus virtually doubling the area under their domination. According to the journalists who observed some of the fighting, UNITA relied primarily on conventional or semiconventional military tactics, as had been its pattern in the southeast for the past several years.

Since April, UNITA appears to have concentrated on consolidating its hold over the newly captured territory rather than trying to push farther to the north and

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west. The insurgents have been expecting government counterattacks following the end of the rainy season in April. There have been fragmentary reports that such attacks may be under way, but we have seen no indication that UNITA has yielded any ground. [REDACTED]

We would not be surprised to see UNITA pull back to some extent in Moxico Province if the government were to send in large forces. In the past, the insurgents have often employed the tactic of pulling back to allow the government columns to penetrate. Then they have attacked inadequately protected convoys attempting to resupply the government's forward elements, eventually forcing the government forces to retreat. [REDACTED]

Intensified Campaign in Central Angola

In more populous west-central Angola, inhabited primarily by the Ovimbundu ethnic group that provides most of UNITA's popular support, the insurgents have stepped up their operations since late last year and have succeeded in isolating a number of government positions. In this region UNITA primarily relies on guerrilla tactics—ambushes, sabotage, and other small-unit operations—[REDACTED]

Among UNITA's main accomplishments in the central region this year has been the isolation of the key provincial capital of Huambo. The guerrillas have attacked road and rail links to the city and have raided some government outposts near it; according to press [REDACTED] Huambo is now largely cut off from outside access except by air. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] life in the city has become very difficult for government and Cuban forces as well as civilians. Supplies of water and electricity are frequently cut off, and there are shortages of key supplies. Only the presence of sizable Cuban and Angolan forces in and around Huambo prevents the guerrillas from overrunning the city. [REDACTED]

The guerrillas have carried out several fairly dramatic operations this year in west-central Angola. These operations seem aimed in part at attracting public attention at home and abroad and at convincing

Angolan and international observers that the Luanda regime and its backers are increasingly unable to contain the insurgency: [REDACTED]

- In March, according to press [REDACTED] they captured 64 Czechoslovak and 20 Portuguese aid technicians and dependents at Alto Catumbela and shepherded them on foot to UNITA base camps in the southeast. [REDACTED]

The seizure of the foreigners reflects the insurgents' longstanding policy, acknowledged publicly by UNITA leader Savimbi, of taking hostages in order to gain attention and to discourage foreign economic assistance to the regime. A few Brazilian aid personnel as well as international Red Cross workers and members of foreign religious groups have also been captured in recent years. UNITA officials have indicated an interest in exchanging some of their captives for UNITA or other prisoners being held by the Angolan Government. [REDACTED]

According to press [REDACTED] the insurgents have also continued to attack the Benguela Railroad in central Angola, preventing the regime from using most of the 1,350-kilometer east-west line. The guerrillas sabotage the rail line and rolling stock at will. Before UNITA effectively shut down the railroad in the late 1970s, it had been a major transportation facility for Angola and its neighbors to the east. UNITA's attacks on the line have forced neighboring Zaire and Zambia to use alternate routes for most of their foreign trade in recent years, thus increasing their dependence on transportation links through South Africa as well as depriving Luanda of much-needed foreign exchange. [REDACTED]

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Breaking New Ground in the North

Since late last year UNITA has also stepped up its forays into the northern third of the country. Guerrilla operations in this region are generally conducted by raiding parties or sabotage teams that go in to attack a specific target and then return to central or southern Angola. [REDACTED]

UNITA lacks a tribal base in the north, where there are few members of the Ovimbundu tribe, the insurgents' main source of support. The region, moreover, is relatively distant from the insurgents' bases and supply lines in the southeast. The insurgents, however, apparently hope to capitalize on local antipathy toward the Angolan Government to build UNITA's popular support in the north. [REDACTED]

Guerrilla operations in the north have focused in recent months on the road and rail lines that traverse the relatively populous Malange area and the diamond-mining region in the northeast. Important guerrilla operations have included the destruction of a key bridge west of the diamond-mining zone around Saurimo and a number of attacks on rail facilities and roads around the city of Malange. [REDACTED]

We lack reliable information on the current status of the diamond industry—Angola's second-largest earner of foreign exchange after crude oil. On the basis of fragmentary evidence, however, we believe that diamond production has been seriously hurt by UNITA's guerrilla operations in recent months. [REDACTED]

Reasons for Insurgents' Success

In our judgment, UNITA's gains since last October are due to the cumulative impact of the insurgents' growing strength and prowess, South Africa's substantial and probably rising assistance, and the Angolan Government's severe military, economic, and political weaknesses. [REDACTED]

UNITA's Growing Strength and Potency

UNITA claims, privately and publicly, to have roughly 35,000 fighters—15,000 regular troops and 20,000 irregulars or guerrillas—and to be capable of training 1,500 men every three months. These figures represent a substantial increase since 1981, when the insurgents claimed to have a total of 20,000 to 25,000 regulars and irregulars. Many of UNITA's irregulars are unarmed and are used as bearers or auxiliaries during operations. [REDACTED]

More South African Aid

We believe South African assistance to UNITA probably increased before and during the period of UNITA's recent advances. [REDACTED]

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A Charismatic Leader

Jonas Malheiro Savimbi, founder, president, commander in chief, and unchallenged leader of UNITA, was born on 3 August 1934 of Ovimbundu parents in Munhango, central Angola. His father was a station master for the Benguela Railroad and also worked as a Protestant missionary in the predominantly Catholic colony. Savimbi studied medicine in Lisbon in 1959 and political science in Switzerland starting in 1960. His studies were interrupted by periods of political and insurgent activity in Africa, but he eventually earned a degree in political and legal science from the University of Lausanne in 1965.

Savimbi was a member of Holden Roberto's Front for the National Liberation of Angola (FNLA) from 1962 to 1964, when he broke away and tried unsuccessfully to gain admission to the Marxist-oriented Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). He founded UNITA in 1966. He accepted a cease-fire agreement with the Portuguese in 1974, formed a short-lived front with Roberto against the MPLA in 1975, and has been waging war against the Marxist MPLA regime for the past eight years.

Savimbi does not seem firmly wedded to any particular ideological orientation. In recent years he has described himself as a moderate Socialist and has espoused pro-Western, anti-Communist positions as well as economic policies that combine socialism and free enterprise. Savimbi has also propounded a philosophy of black power or "Negritude," probably in part as a reaction to the role played within the MPLA regime by Marxist-oriented mulattos. He has insisted that his approach is not "racist" and that he is simply arguing for having blacks, who comprise the vast majority of the Angolan population, hold the key positions in any Angolan regime.

Savimbi is said to favor seeking a political settlement in which UNITA would be given a major role in a coalition regime. The differences within UNITA over goals appear to break down along age lines, with older, more politically sensitive leaders favoring a political settlement and younger, more militant troop commanders calling for total victory.

UNITA seems to lack other figures with Savimbi's personal appeal and exceptional leadership abilities, and his removal would be a severe setback. We do not believe UNITA would disappear, but it would be considerably weakened, at least temporarily. Ultimately, it could emerge as a more inflexible movement seeking an all-out military victory rather than a negotiated solution. UNITA might also become more heavily influenced by South Africa without a leader of Savimbi's stature to maintain a degree of independence.

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UNITA: History and Present Status

Jonas Savimbi founded UNITA on 23 March 1966 after breaking with Holden Roberto's Front for the National Liberation of Angola (FNLA).^a UNITA initially operated from bases in Zambia and maintained a headquarters in Lusaka. [REDACTED]

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UNITA grew rapidly because of energetic organizing among Savimbi's fellow Ovimbundu and some eastern Angolan tribes. It nonetheless remained smaller and weaker than the Zairian- and Western-backed FNLA and the Soviet-supported Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). [REDACTED]

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Zambia expelled Savimbi and his followers in 1967 because of Portuguese pressure. In 1968 Savimbi infiltrated into Angola and established a headquarters in its sparsely populated southeast. UNITA's main theater of operations, however, was the more populous central highlands, where the Ovimbundu tribe, comprising about 40 percent of Angola's population of around 7 million, predominates. [REDACTED]

In February 1976, after UNITA had been militarily defeated by the newly installed Soviet- and Cuban-backed MPLA regime in Luanda, Savimbi led a return to the bush to rebuild the movement. Some 1,500 ill-equipped guerrillas retreated to southeastern Angola. In the ensuing years UNITA gradually established its control over most of Cuando Cubango Province in the southeast and carried on a guerrilla war in central Angola. [REDACTED]

Savimbi has remained UNITA's unchallenged leader. A 17-member Politburo is the top party organ. The leading officials after Savimbi are Secretary General Miguel Puna and the military Chief of Staff, Demostenes Chilingutilla. Puna is a Cabindan, and the UNITA leadership includes a few other non-Ovimbundus as well. [REDACTED]

We estimate, on the basis of UNITA claims and other evidence, that UNITA's army—the Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FALA)—includes some 15,000 regular troops and 20,000 guerrillas. Military operations are directed by a Strategic Operations Command led by Savimbi and senior commanders. [REDACTED]

^a The FNLA, which operated in northern Angola, has been virtually moribund in recent years as a result of factional quarrels and curtailment of Zairian support. [REDACTED]

Within the area of control, UNITA has set up a functioning government with an array of rudimentary but well-run health and educational services and agricultural enterprises, according to Western journalists who have visited the region. [REDACTED]

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UNITA's area of expansion—the northern third of the country—has no permanent insurgent presence. We believe the insurgents may soon move to establish a permanent guerrilla force in this region. [REDACTED]

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UNITA has chosen to equip its forces mainly with rifles and other light infantry weapons. Artillery support for the conventional battalions and brigades is provided by light mortars and recoilless rifles. UNITA also has captured some SA-7 missile launchers and a few larger artillery pieces from the Angolan Army. [REDACTED]

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In addition to seizures of arms and ammunition from government forces, we believe the insurgents continue to receive military supplies from South Africa, purchase other weapons on the international arms market, and still have sizable stocks of Western arms supplied in the 1970s. [REDACTED]

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Angola's military efforts against the insurgents also are hindered by poor tactics. [REDACTED]

substantial portion of the government's forces are tied down in defense of fixed positions—bridges, roads, and garrisons—threatened by the insurgents. Moreover, the government does not make effective use of its airpower, and UNITA, according to Western journalists, operates with little fear of air attack. [REDACTED]

Problems Created by Rainy Season. UNITA's most recent gains coincided with Angola's wettest rainy season in several years. In general, while UNITA has operated successfully during both wet and dry periods in the past, rains work against the government's forces. Rainfall makes the country's poor roads even more difficult for Army truck convoys carrying troops and supplies. [REDACTED]

The rains also spur vegetation growth augmenting the cover available to guerrilla forces and thus increasing their ability to lay ambushes and avoid aerial detection. [REDACTED]

Limited Cuban Military Effort. Cuba's military forces have been criticized for years by some Angolan officials for not doing more of the fighting. [REDACTED] the Cubans have become more active against UNITA since early 1982. [REDACTED]

For the most part, however, the evidence suggests to us that the Cubans still see their main role as one of guarding rear areas and main garrisons. [REDACTED]

have not committed their larger units to battle. Angolan forces continue to do most of the fighting, but further UNITA advances could lead to heavier Cuban involvement.¹ [REDACTED]

Economic and Political Difficulties. The Angolan Government's broad economic and political shortcomings also have continued to impede its efforts against UNITA. [REDACTED]

Angola's economic performance—except for Western-run oil production in the northern Cabinda enclave—has steadily worsened in recent years, further eroding the government's popular standing and enhancing UNITA's opportunities. Living conditions have fallen to new lows throughout the country over the past year, [REDACTED] The insurgency has continued to disrupt agricultural, mining, and industrial production, as well as transportation networks. The country still suffers, moreover, from the departure in the mid-1970s of the Portuguese personnel who had run most of the economy. Soviet and East European economic and technical aid remains far short of the country's substantial needs. [REDACTED]

Public support for the government has never been very broad. It comes mainly from among the 1.7 million members of the Kimbundu tribe and some smaller groups the Kimbundu dominate. Ideological and ethnic factionalism within the regime has further weakened its ability to combat the insurgents. [REDACTED]

¹ We estimate that there are 25,000 to 30,000 Cuban military personnel in Angola. This includes roughly 20,000 combat troops and 5,000 to 10,000 advisory, support, and technical personnel. The bulk of the Cuban forces are stationed in central and southern Angola. In addition to their role against UNITA, the Cubans man air and ground defenses along the southern rail line that serves as Angola's main defensive line against South Africa. [REDACTED]

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Anxiety in Luanda

[redacted]

UNITA's gains since late last year have instilled a sense of crisis throughout the ruling Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA).

[redacted]

UNITA, in fact, has achieved its gains in the face of increased Cuban and Angolan Government military efforts. Starting in late 1981, three additional Angolan brigades and a Cuban brigade were moved to positions facing UNITA's southeastern stronghold. The government also launched several counterinsurgency offensives during 1982, took steps to improve and secure its supply lines, and moved to deny UNITA access to the population in several areas by forcing civilians into fortified villages defended by government troops. The failure of all these efforts to prevent a widening of UNITA operations almost certainly has contributed to the atmosphere of growing concern in Luanda. [redacted]

Adding to the government's distress, [redacted]

[redacted] are the severe economic and social disruptions resulting from the insurgency. In addition, although the oil industry has not been directly affected by the fighting, Angolan officials are worried over growing difficulties Luanda is having in paying for Communist military aid. Revenues from oil exports, the country's primary source of hard currency, have been falling due to the softness of the international oil market. Although available statistics are scanty and contradictory, we believe that Angola in recent years has had to use most of its hard currency earnings to pay for Soviet, East European, and Cuban military

aid and to meet other war-related expenses such as food imports necessitated by the decline in domestic production as a result of the fighting. [redacted]

As Angola becomes less and less able to pay for military aid, the Soviets will be faced with difficult decisions as to the levels at which such assistance is to be maintained. Although Angolan officials may fear that the result could be a cutback in Soviet military aid, we believe that Soviet and Cuban assistance is likely to remain at existing levels or even increase, given Moscow's unwillingness to see a client state go down to defeat. [redacted]

UNITA's Prospects

We believe UNITA may be able to take some additional territory during the next several months. Its next major gains could come in the northeast, where the Angolans and Cubans do not have a strong military presence. [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

The insurgents, in our judgment, will find it more difficult to make major new gains in southeastern and central Angola in the immediate future. The recent gains in the southeast were made against relatively undefended areas, and any large-scale UNITA expansion from the southeast to the west would bring the insurgents up against major, well-defended Angolan-Cuban garrisons. [redacted]

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In central Angola, we expect guerrilla attacks to continue at or near their current levels. Although UNITA almost certainly will continue to make life difficult for the Angolans and Cubans in this area, we doubt that the guerrillas can decisively defeat the major Angolan and Cuban forces in the central region during the next few months. [REDACTED]

Reconciliation With the MPLA?

Savimbi has made clear, both publicly and privately, that he wants at a minimum to force the Luanda regime to negotiate some sort of power-sharing arrangement in which UNITA would be brought into a coalition government and the Cubans would be sent home. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A Cuban Withdrawal?

In the absence of some sort of accommodation between UNITA and the MPLA regime, all or most of the leadership in Luanda—hardliners and moderates alike—recognize how vulnerable they would be without the Cubans. [REDACTED]

Despite the extreme difficulty Luanda would have in agreeing to a withdrawal of all or most of the Cuban forces, we believe there remains some possibility of a breakthrough on this issue, considering the acute economic and military pressures on the dos Santos government and what we know of attitudes within the regime.³ [REDACTED]

³ The Cubans, for their part, have reiterated publicly that they would withdraw from Angola if asked to do so by Luanda. [REDACTED]

A *total* Cuban military withdrawal, in our view, probably would paralyze the Angolan Army and enable UNITA to win the war outright unless accompanied by a UNITA-MPLA accommodation. The Angolans depend not only on Cuban combat units that participate in the fighting but also on Cuban advisers and technicians who hold key support and operational positions throughout the Angolan Army—positions for which the Angolans lack trained personnel of their own. [REDACTED]

If the Cubans withdrew *most but not all* of their personnel—for example, if they removed the bulk of their combat troops but kept most of their advisory and support personnel in Angola—the effect would be more difficult to predict. We believe, however, that if such a withdrawal occurred and there were no UNITA-MPLA accommodation, UNITA would make significant new military gains. Exactly how far the insurgents would advance in these circumstances would depend on just what roles the remaining Cubans played—specifically, on whether they assumed combat responsibilities or remained only in advisory and technical capacities—and on the levels of support from the USSR. [REDACTED]

We assume that, as part of an agreement providing for a Namibian settlement and a Cuban withdrawal from Angola, South Africa would be asked to curtail its support for UNITA. Even so, we would expect UNITA to remain fairly well armed and supplied and to continue posing a military threat to the Luanda regime if no accommodation were reached:

- We think the South Africans would find a way to continue supplying arms and supplies to the insurgents clandestinely, although probably at a somewhat reduced level since Namibian territory would no longer be available for this purpose. South African supplies might be brought in by air or sea, or via Zaire assuming President Mobutu could be persuaded to acquiesce.
- Even if Pretoria were to stop providing aid following a Namibian settlement, we believe it would furnish UNITA with large quantities of arms and supplies ahead of time, enabling the insurgents to build sizable caches.

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- UNITA in any case would almost certainly continue to capture munitions and other supplies from government forces. [REDACTED]

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Thus, we believe that a withdrawal of most Cuban forces from Angola as a result of a Namibian settlement or some other development—and without an accompanying UNITA-MPLA accommodation—would result in significant UNITA gains and perhaps an outright UNITA military victory. Moreover, we believe this would occur regardless of the level of South Africa's support to the insurgents in the wake of such a settlement. [REDACTED]

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As UNITA began making new military gains following a Cuban withdrawal, the MPLA, in our view, would probably become anxious for a negotiated settlement. UNITA, however, might well lose interest in negotiations if it believed a complete military victory was in sight. [REDACTED]

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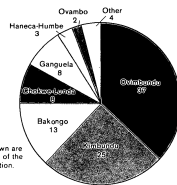
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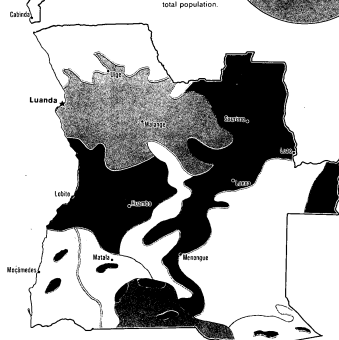
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Major Tribal Groups

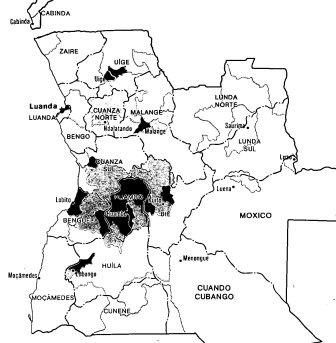
Bakongo
 Chokwe-Lunda
 Ganguela
 Haneca-Humbe
 Herero
 Khoisan
 Kimbundu
 Ovambo
 Oshimundu
 Xindonga



Figures shown are percentages of the total population.



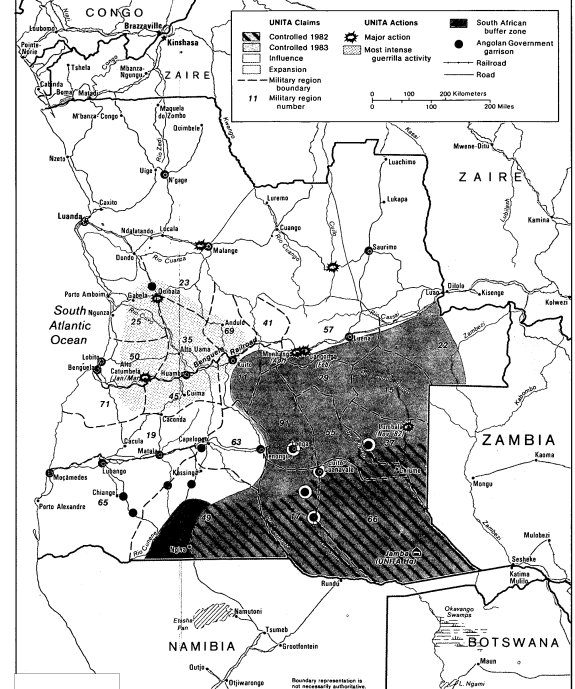
Population Distribution



Population density based on 1970 census
 Persons per square kilometer
 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 110 120 130 140 150 160 170 180 190 200 210 220 230 240 250 260 270 280 290 300 310 320 330 340 350 360 370 380 390 400 410 420 430 440 450 460 470 480 490 500 510 520 530 540 550 560 570 580 590 600 610 620 630 640 650 660 670 680 690 700 710 720 730 740 750 760 770 780 790 800 810 820 830 840 850 860 870 880 890 900 910 920 930 940 950 960 970 980 990 1000

Province boundary

UNITA'S Presence and Recent Actions in Angola



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